




Examining the Impact of Socio-Economic Status on the National Identity of Youth (Case Study: Youth Aged 18-30 in District 1 of Shiraz)

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to examine the influence of socio-economic status (SES) on the national identity of youth aged 18-30 in District 1 of Shiraz, Iran.

Methods and Materials: A descriptive-correlational research design was employed, with a sample of 384 youth selected through multi-stage cluster sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire that assessed SES and national identity. The questionnaire was self-administered, and the data were analyzed using SPSS and SMART PLS software. Descriptive statistics, factor loadings, and structural equation modeling (SEM) were used to explore the relationships between variables.

Findings: The results indicate that SES significantly influences national identity among youth in Shiraz. Higher levels of education, income, and occupational status were associated with stronger national identity. Additionally, mental well-being, linked to SES, was found to play a critical role in the development of national identity. The study also found that cultural capital, tied to family affluence, significantly contributes to national identity, with youth from higher SES backgrounds exhibiting a stronger sense of national belonging.

Conclusion: The findings suggest that socio-economic status is a critical determinant of national identity among youth. Educational attainment, income, and occupational status, along with mental well-being and cultural capital, are key factors that influence how youth perceive and engage with their national identity. The study highlights the need for targeted interventions to address socio-economic disparities and promote a strong, inclusive national identity.

Keywords: Socio-economic status, national identity, youth, Shiraz, education, mental well-being, cultural capital

1. Introduction

Socio-economic status encompasses a range of factors, including income, education, and occupational status, which collectively influence the resources available to individuals and their families. These resources, in turn, impact the opportunities for education, socialization, and the development of identity (Giskes et al., 2002; Senkyire et al., 2022). Research has consistently shown that socio-economic factors play a significant role in shaping various aspects of youth development, including health, educational outcomes, and social behaviors.

For instance, Hartas (2011) highlighted that families' social backgrounds, including SES, significantly influence children's language, literacy, and social outcomes. In this context, youth from higher SES backgrounds often have greater access to educational resources, which can lead to better academic performance and a stronger sense of identity (Hartas, 2011). Similarly, Jia (2022) found that family SES influences the use of internet learning among youth, with those from higher SES backgrounds being more likely to engage in online educational activities, further enhancing their academic and social development (Jia, 2022).

In terms of physical health, SES has been linked to various outcomes among youth. Assefa, Belachew, and Negash (2015) reported that socio-demographic factors, including SES, are associated with underweight and stunting among adolescents in Ethiopia. This indicates that youth from lower SES backgrounds may face more significant health challenges, which can, in turn, affect their overall development and identity formation.

The impact of SES extends to social behaviors and attitudes as well. Buunk, Stulp, and Ormel (2014) explored the relationship between parental social status and intrasexual competitiveness among youth, suggesting that those from higher SES backgrounds may exhibit different social behaviors compared to their lower SES counterparts (Buunk et al., 2014). This variation in social behavior can influence how youth perceive themselves and their place within society, contributing to their national identity.

Mental well-being is another critical area where SES exerts a significant influence. Research has shown that youth from lower SES backgrounds are more likely to experience mental health issues, which can negatively impact their sense of identity and belonging. Dray et al. (2016) found a strong association between socio-demographic characteristics, including SES, and mental health problems among Australian adolescents. These findings suggest that

the mental well-being of youth, influenced by their socio-economic conditions, plays a crucial role in shaping their national identity (Dray et al., 2016).

Furthermore, Cosma et al. (2020) examined time trends in adolescent mental well-being in Czechia and found significant gender, age, and socio-economic differences. This study highlights the importance of considering SES when addressing the mental well-being of youth and its subsequent impact on identity formation. Poor mental health can lead to a weakened sense of national identity, as youth may feel disconnected from their cultural and national roots (Cosma et al., 2020).

National identity is deeply intertwined with an individual's socio-economic environment. Filsinger et al. (2021) investigated the relationship between conceptions of nationhood and populist attitudes, emphasizing the role of national identity in political and social contexts. The study suggested that individuals' socio-economic backgrounds could shape their views on nationhood and influence their national identity (Filsinger et al., 2021).

Similarly, Richter, Leppin, and Gabhainn (2006) explored the relationship between parental SES and episodes of drunkenness among adolescents, indicating that youth from lower SES backgrounds might engage in riskier behaviors that can impact their national identity. This finding aligns with the broader understanding that socio-economic conditions influence not only individual behaviors but also collective identity formation (Richter et al., 2006).

Moreover, Mercken et al. (2012) highlighted the effectiveness of school-based smoking prevention interventions among low- and high-SES European teenagers. The study found that SES plays a crucial role in the success of such interventions, further underscoring the impact of socio-economic factors on youth behavior and identity. In this context, SES can influence how youth engage with their national identity through health-related behaviors and attitudes (Mercken et al., 2012).

Fagg et al. (2013) introduced the 'socio-economic equalization in youth' hypothesis, which posits that socio-economic disparities may diminish during youth as individuals experience more equalizing influences, such as schooling and peer interactions. This hypothesis suggests that while SES plays a significant role in early development, its influence may become less pronounced as youth integrate into broader social structures. However, this equalization is not absolute, and SES continues to impact various aspects of youth development, including national identity (Fagg et al., 2013).

Geel and Vedder (2009) also discussed the role of family obligations and school adjustment in explaining the immigrant paradox, where immigrant youth, despite often coming from lower SES backgrounds, perform better academically than expected. This paradox highlights the complex interplay between SES, cultural identity, and national identity. While SES can provide certain advantages or disadvantages, cultural factors and individual resilience can mediate these effects, influencing how youth develop their sense of national identity (Geel & Vedder, 2009).

Cultural capital, often linked with SES, also plays a significant role in shaping youth identity. Fismen, Samdal, and Torsheim (2012) found that family affluence and cultural capital were significant indicators of social inequalities in eating behaviors among adolescents. This relationship between SES and cultural practices extends to broader aspects of identity formation, including national identity. Youth from higher SES backgrounds often have greater access to cultural resources that reinforce their national identity, while those from lower SES backgrounds may face challenges in accessing and internalizing these cultural elements (Fismen et al., 2012).

In the educational context, Timar-Anton, Negru-Subtirica, and Damian (2023) explored the role of parental SES and perceived career-related behaviors in the developmental trajectories of educational identity in adolescence. Their findings indicate that SES not only influences educational outcomes but also the development of identity within the educational sphere, which is closely linked to national identity (Timar-Anton et al., 2023).

Health-related behaviors, influenced by SES, are another important factor in the development of national identity. Utter et al. (2010) examined socio-economic differences in eating-related attitudes, behaviors, and environments among adolescents, finding that SES significantly affects these behaviors (Utter et al., 2010). These eating behaviors, shaped by socio-economic conditions, can also reflect broader cultural practices and contribute to the formation of national identity.

Similarly, Giskes et al. (2002) found that socio-economic differences in fruit and vegetable consumption among Australian adolescents and adults were significant, suggesting that SES influences not only health behaviors but also the cultural aspects of identity linked to these behaviors. As health behaviors are often culturally and nationally embedded, they play a role in reinforcing or challenging an individual's national identity (Giskes et al., 2002).

In sum, national identity, a sense of belonging and pride associated with one's nation, plays a critical role in shaping the values, behaviors, and overall worldview of individuals. Among youth, national identity is particularly significant as this stage of life is marked by the formation of self-concept and the integration of personal and societal values. Various factors contribute to the development and strength of national identity, with socio-economic status (SES) being a crucial determinant. This study seeks to explore the impact of socio-economic status on the national identity of youth, specifically within the context of Shiraz, Iran.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study adopts a descriptive-correlational research design aimed at exploring the relationship between socio-economic status and national identity among youth aged 18 to 30 in District 1 of Shiraz. The population for this study includes both male and female residents within this age group living in Shiraz in the year 2022, which, according to the 2021 Statistical Yearbook, totals approximately 751,201 individuals. Of these, about 68,291 reside in District 1. A multi-stage cluster sampling method was employed to select the participants. Initially, the city of Shiraz was divided into 11 municipal districts, each considered as a primary cluster. District 1 was then selected as the target cluster for this study. Within this district, a list of 28 major boulevards and streets was compiled, which were treated as blocks for the final sampling. A total of 384 young individuals were selected as the sample size, with 400 questionnaires distributed to ensure full participation. After the collection and removal of incomplete questionnaires, data from 384 valid questionnaires were analyzed.

2.2. Measures

Data was gathered using a structured questionnaire divided into two main sections. The first section measured socio-economic status through various items including gender, age, marital status, family size, respondent's education level, father's education level, mother's education level, income level, respondent's occupation, father's occupation, mother's occupation, housing status, and access to welfare amenities. The second section assessed national identity using an 11-item Likert scale, with items such as "The three-color flag of Iran is a source of pride for us" and "Sometimes I wish I was not born in Iran" designed to gauge

participants' sense of national identity. The questionnaire was self-administered, with participants completing it at their homes in the designated blocks.

2.3. *Data analysis*

The data collected from the 384 valid questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS and SMART PLS software. SPSS was used primarily for descriptive statistics and preliminary analysis, including the calculation of Cronbach's alpha (which was found to be 0.877) to assess the reliability of the scales. SMART PLS was utilized for structural equation modeling (SEM) to explore the relationships between socio-economic status variables and national identity. The results of these analyses were used to test the study's hypotheses and draw conclusions regarding the impact of socio-economic status on national identity among the youth in District 1 of Shiraz.

3. **Findings and Results**

The descriptive analysis of the respondents' demographics reveals that out of the 384 participants, 216 (56.3%) were female, and 168 (43.8%) were male. Marital status analysis shows that 215 (55.9%) were single, and 139 (44.1%) were married.

Regarding educational attainment, 16 respondents (4.2%) had less than a high school diploma, 119 (31%) had a high school diploma, 63 (16.4%) had an associate degree, 110

(28.6%) held a bachelor's degree, and 20 (5.2%) had a master's degree or higher. The educational levels of the respondents' fathers indicated that 142 (37%) had less than a high school diploma, 124 (32.3%) had a high school diploma, 31 (8.1%) had an associate degree, 50 (13%) held a bachelor's degree, and 10 (2.6%) had a master's degree or higher. For the mothers, 165 (43%) had less than a high school diploma, 140 (36.5%) had a high school diploma, 16 (4.2%) had an associate degree, 41 (10.7%) held a bachelor's degree, and 16 (4.2%) had a master's degree or higher.

In terms of income levels, 123 respondents (32%) reported earning less than 5 million tomans, 29 (7.6%) earned between 5 to 7 million, 59 (15.4%) earned between 7 to 10 million, 7 (1.8%) earned between 10 to 15 million, and 61 (15.9%) earned more than 15 million tomans.

Regarding employment status, 68 respondents (17.7%) were self-employed, 21 (5.5%) were unemployed, 38 (9.9%) were homemakers, 131 (34.1%) were students, and 126 (32.8%) were employed as staff. Analysis of the fathers' occupations showed that 101 (26.3%) were self-employed, 220 (57.3%) were retired, 24 (6.3%) were unemployed, and 39 (10.2%) were employed as staff. For the mothers, 16 (4.2%) were self-employed, 60 (15.6%) were retired, 293 (76.3%) were homemakers, and 15 (3.9%) were employed as staff.

Regarding housing status, 151 respondents (39.3%) lived in their parental home, 133 (34.6%) owned a home, and 100 (26%) lived in rented accommodations.

Table 1

Factor Loadings of Research Variables on Socio-Economic Status

Variable	Factor Loading	Standard Deviation	t-value	p-value
Welfare Amenities >> SES	0.780	0.036	21.429	0.000
Education >> SES	0.839	0.026	32.422	0.000
Income >> SES	0.880	0.018	48.428	0.000
Housing >> SES	0.881	0.016	55.576	0.000
National Identity >> SES	0.847	0.019	44.299	0.000
Employment Status >> SES	0.745	0.041	18.175	0.000

To assess the normality of data distribution, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was conducted. The results indicated that the data distribution was not normal as the significance level was less than 0.05, thereby rejecting the assumption of normality.

The results show that the factor loadings of various indicators of socio-economic status (SES). All indicators have significant loadings ($p < 0.05$), confirming their importance in defining SES in the study.

Table 2

Reliability and Convergent Validity of SES and National Identity

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha (CA)	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE
National Identity	0.865	0.876	0.509
Socio-Economic Status (SES)	0.888	0.899	0.642

Table 2 presents the reliability and convergent validity statistics. Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.7 indicate good reliability, and AVE values above 0.5 confirm that the

variables explain a substantial portion of their indicators' variance.

Table 3

Factor Loadings of National Identity Measures

Measure	Factor Loading	Standard Deviation	t-value	p-value
National Identity >> S16	0.699	0.216	3.230	0.001
National Identity >> S18	0.630	0.201	3.130	0.002
National Identity >> S19	0.696	0.214	3.244	0.001
National Identity >> S21	0.896	0.287	3.127	0.002
National Identity >> S22	0.867	0.283	3.060	0.002
National Identity >> S23	0.553	0.193	2.862	0.004
National Identity >> S24	0.581	0.199	2.917	0.004

Table 3 shows that all factor loadings for the national identity measures are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$),

confirming that each measure contributes meaningfully to the overall construct of national identity.

Table 4

Goodness-of-Fit for Structural Model of National Identity

Variable	R ²	Communality	GoF
National Identity	0.03	0.509	0.139

The GoF value of 0.139, as shown in Table 4, indicates a moderate fit of the overall model for national identity.

Table 5

Path Coefficients for SES Impact on National Identity

Pathway	Coefficient	Standard Deviation	t-value	p-value
SES >> National Identity	0.194	0.061	3.19	0.001

Table 5 shows that the socio-economic status (SES) has a significant positive impact on national identity, with a coefficient of 0.194 and a t-value of 3.19 ($p < 0.05$),

supporting the hypothesis that SES influences national identity among the youth in Shiraz.

Figure 1

Bootstrap (t-values) of the impact of socio-economic status on national identity

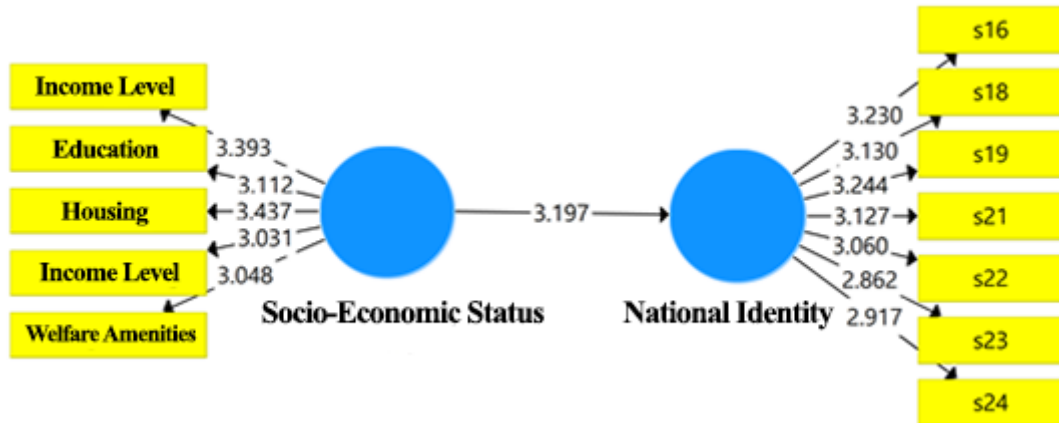
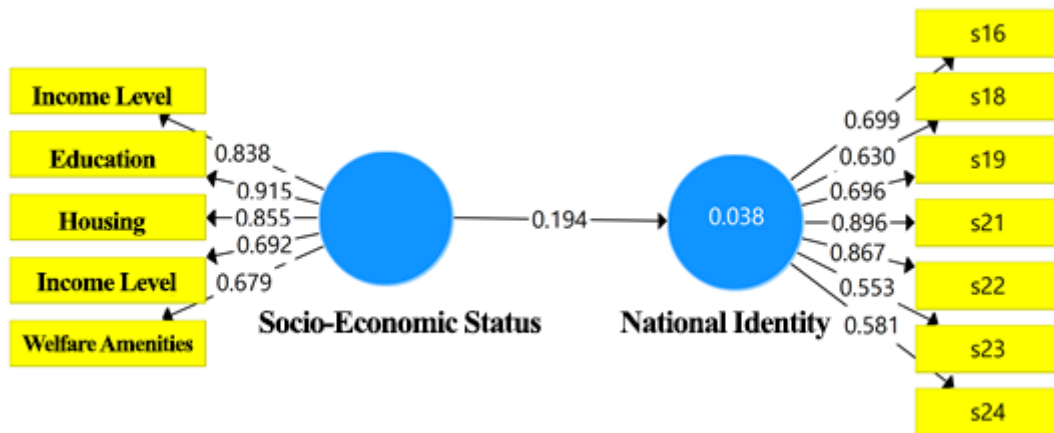


Figure 2

The fitted model of the impact of socio-economic status on national identity in the standard estimation state



4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to investigate the influence of socio-economic status (SES) on the national identity of youth in Shiraz, Iran. The findings provide substantial evidence that SES significantly impacts national identity, with various socio-economic factors such as education, income, and occupational status playing pivotal roles. This discussion will delve into these results, drawing on previous studies to support and explain the findings.

The study found that SES, as measured by education, income, and occupational status, has a significant positive relationship with national identity among youth in Shiraz. This aligns with Filsinger et al. (2021), who identified that conceptions of nationhood and populist attitudes are influenced by individuals' socio-economic backgrounds

(Filsinger et al., 2021). Higher SES provides more opportunities for youth to engage with cultural and national symbols, thereby strengthening their national identity. The results indicate that youth from higher SES backgrounds are more likely to express strong national identity, possibly due to better access to educational resources that promote national history, language, and culture.

Education, a critical component of SES, was found to be a significant predictor of national identity. This finding is consistent with the work of Timar-Anton, Negru-Subtirica, and Damian (2023), who highlighted the role of parental SES in shaping educational identity during adolescence, which is closely related to national identity (Timar-Anton et al., 2023). Education provides youth with knowledge and understanding of their nation's history, values, and culture, thereby fostering a strong sense of belonging and identity.

Moreover, higher educational attainment often correlates with greater exposure to diverse cultural and historical narratives, which can reinforce national pride and identity.

Income, another crucial aspect of SES, also showed a strong positive correlation with national identity. This result is supported by the findings of Utter et al. (2010), who demonstrated that socio-economic differences significantly impact adolescents' eating-related attitudes and behaviors, which are culturally and nationally embedded (Utter et al., 2010). Similarly, Giskes et al. (2002) reported that socio-economic differences influence health behaviors, which are often tied to cultural practices and, by extension, national identity (Giskes et al., 2002). Youth from higher-income families likely have more opportunities to participate in cultural and national events, further solidifying their national identity.

Occupational status, as part of the SES construct, was also found to be a significant determinant of national identity. This aligns with Buunk, Stulp, and Ormel (2014), who noted that parental social status affects social behaviors, which in turn influence identity formation (Buunk et al., 2014). Occupational status often dictates social networks and access to cultural resources, both of which are essential for developing a strong national identity. Youth whose parents hold higher-status occupations are likely to be more integrated into societal structures that promote national identity.

The study also highlighted the relationship between mental well-being and national identity, with youth from lower SES backgrounds exhibiting weaker national identity, potentially due to higher levels of mental health issues. This finding is in line with the research by Dray et al. (2016), who found a strong association between socio-demographic characteristics, including SES, and mental health problems among Australian adolescents (Dray et al., 2016). Poor mental health can lead to feelings of alienation and disconnection, which may weaken an individual's sense of national identity. Furthermore, Cosma et al. (2020) showed significant socio-economic differences in mental well-being (Cosma et al., 2020), reinforcing the idea that SES impacts not only physical health but also the psychological dimensions of identity.

The results suggest that interventions aimed at improving the mental well-being of youth, particularly those from lower SES backgrounds, could also strengthen their national identity. This is crucial as mental health is a significant factor in how youth perceive themselves and their place within their nation. A positive sense of national identity is

often linked to better mental health outcomes, creating a cyclical relationship where improved mental health reinforces national identity, which in turn supports mental well-being.

Cultural capital, closely tied to SES, was also found to influence national identity. The study's results support the findings of Fismen, Samdal, and Torsheim (2012), who demonstrated that family affluence and cultural capital are significant indicators of social inequalities in adolescent behaviors, including those related to national identity (Fismen et al., 2012). Youth from affluent families are more likely to possess the cultural capital necessary to engage with national symbols and narratives, thereby fostering a strong national identity. In contrast, those from lower SES backgrounds may lack the resources to fully participate in cultural practices that reinforce national identity, leading to weaker national identification.

The role of cultural capital in national identity is further supported by the work of Geel and Vedder (2009), who discussed the immigrant paradox, where youth from immigrant backgrounds, despite often being from lower SES families, perform better academically than expected due to strong cultural identity and family support (Geel & Vedder, 2009). This suggests that while SES is a critical factor, cultural capital and family support can mediate its effects, allowing youth to develop a strong national identity even in the face of socio-economic challenges.

The socio-economic equalization hypothesis posits that socio-economic disparities may diminish during youth as individuals experience more equalizing influences, such as schooling and peer interactions. However, the findings of this study suggest that while schooling and peer interactions do play a role in shaping national identity, the impact of SES remains significant. This is consistent with the findings of Fagg et al. (2013), who explored the 'socio-economic equalization in youth' hypothesis and found that SES continues to influence youth development despite the presence of equalizing factors (Fagg et al., 2013).

The persistence of SES effects on national identity highlights the need for targeted interventions that address these disparities. While equalizing influences like education can mitigate some of the effects of low SES, additional support is needed to ensure that all youth, regardless of their socio-economic background, have the opportunity to develop a strong national identity. This could include providing access to cultural resources, promoting inclusive educational curricula that reflect diverse national narratives, and supporting mental health initiatives.

5. Limitations & Suggestions

This study encountered some limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the study's cross-sectional design limits the ability to infer causality between SES and national identity. Although the findings suggest a strong correlation, it is not possible to determine whether SES directly influences national identity or if other mediating factors play a significant role.

Second, the study's reliance on self-reported data may introduce bias, as participants may have provided socially desirable responses, particularly when discussing sensitive topics such as national identity. Additionally, the study was conducted in a single geographic location, Shiraz, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions in Iran or other countries with different socio-cultural contexts.

Finally, the study did not account for potential confounding variables such as ethnicity, religion, or political affiliation, which could also influence national identity. These factors, which may intersect with SES, were not explored in depth, potentially limiting the comprehensiveness of the findings.

Given the limitations of this study, several directions for future research are suggested. First, longitudinal studies should be conducted to better understand the causal relationship between SES and national identity. By tracking changes in SES and national identity over time, researchers can gain deeper insights into how socio-economic factors influence identity formation throughout youth and into adulthood.

Second, future research should explore the role of confounding variables such as ethnicity, religion, and political affiliation in shaping national identity. These factors, which intersect with SES, may provide a more nuanced understanding of how national identity develops among diverse youth populations. Additionally, comparative studies across different regions or countries could offer valuable insights into how socio-economic factors influence national identity in varying socio-cultural contexts.

Finally, qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews and focus groups, could be employed to explore the subjective experiences of youth from different SES backgrounds. Such studies could provide rich, detailed accounts of how youth perceive their national identity and the factors that contribute to its development, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between SES and national identity.

Based on the findings of this study, several practical recommendations can be made for educators, policymakers, and community leaders. First, educational institutions should incorporate curricula that reflect the diverse cultural and historical narratives of the nation, ensuring that all youth, regardless of their SES background, have the opportunity to engage with and develop a strong national identity. This could include the inclusion of national history, literature, and cultural studies that emphasize the shared values and experiences that define the nation.

Second, mental health support services should be made more accessible to youth, particularly those from lower SES backgrounds. By addressing the mental health challenges that can weaken national identity, these services can help reinforce a positive sense of belonging and pride in one's nation. Schools, in particular, should integrate mental health education into their programs, helping students understand the importance of mental well-being in identity formation.

Finally, community-based initiatives that promote cultural engagement and national pride should be supported. These could include cultural festivals, national celebrations, and youth programs that provide opportunities for young people to connect with their national identity in meaningful ways. Such initiatives should be inclusive, ensuring that youth from all socio-economic backgrounds can participate and feel valued as part of the national community.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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Authors' Contributions

This article is derived from the first author's doctoral dissertation. All authors equally contributed to this article.

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